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New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ehouzou (Benin), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015"

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this meeting in such a timely fashion. My delegation wishes to express its support for the statement made at the 88th meeting by Minister Massiah of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and, at the same meeting, by the Ambassador of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. I will now deliver my country's statement.

As one of the three pillars that support and guide the United Nations, development is a complex, changing process that must be carried out through a multiplicity of interrelated activities. Initially it might appear that development concerns only lower- and middle-income countries, but that would be a short-sighted way of understanding the significance of the interrelatedness of countries, cultures and individuals. Development, or the lack thereof, is everyone's business. International migratory flows of tremendous numbers of workers or of poor people seeking to alleviate their situation in another place are a clear illustration of what I am talking about. The endurance of obstacles to exports from developing countries to developed countries can aggravate that phenomenon, which was so graphically described by the President of my country, Mr. Óscar Arias, when he said that if we cannot export our products to your markets, the harsh reality is that we will export our people. Nobody wants that.

The steep increase in the price of oil and, subsequently, of fuel and now of staple foods for the poor and middle class has brought this reality home to the immense majority of the 6 billion inhabitants of this planet.

Since we are speaking of the planet, the unexpected break-up of an ice sheet in Antarctica and the stifling summer heat in Europe remind us that we cannot escape the fact that what a community does on the Pacific coast will sooner or later manifest itself on the Atlantic coast, thousands of miles away. The effect of human activity on the soil, rivers, the ocean and the atmosphere will have an impact on all the inhabitants of the planet.

That is why, in order to ensure that development is a source of life and not a cause of death and deterioration, it must be sustainable development and must avoid waste. It must spread knowledge and not consumerism. It must reduce spending on arms and increase investment in health, education, roads and housing. That is what we propose in the Costa Rica Consensus, in other words, to reward countries that

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reduce military spending and increase social investments.

When, in September 2000, the heads of State and Government of the Member States reaffirmed here, in this building, their faith in the Organization and its Charter as the indispensable foundation of a more peaceful, prosperous and fair world, they were committing their countries to eliminating the obstacles that prevent the provision of food, education and health to everyone. In some cases, that commitment would begin by doing everything possible to put an end to a war that, among its many evils, robs children and young people of their future. It is absurd to maintain a permanent war. Is it not better to seek an accommodation, even if it falls short of everything one wants? In politics, one needs more courage to agree than to disagree. Such courage is necessary for peace agreements.

At the same time, in order to honour their commitments, donor countries must devote 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to official development assistance. In all countries, that commitment means governing while improving the allocation of resources in national budgets and more effectively and efficiently implementing governmental programmes of action. We must acknowledge today that, for one reason or another, the commitments made at the 2000 Summit have only been honoured halfway in most cases. Unfortunately, especially in countries and regions beset by armed conflict, the results leave a lot to be desired. At the same time, we must underscore that there has been some significant progress, especially where there is no war and where Governments are committed to achieving the Goals.

Allow me now to refer to some results and to the status of compliance with the Millennium Development Goals in my own country.

First, in 2000, poverty affected 20.6 per cent of our households. In 2006 it had dropped to 20.2 per cent. The greatest reduction was in 2007, when the rate was 17 per cent. That means that we are still far from meeting the Goal but, if the pace of reduction between 2006 and 2007 is maintained, our country will succeed in achieving the goal of reducing poverty by 50 per cent by 2015 — that is to say that 10 per cent or fewer households will be in poverty.

Second, the rate of primary school enrolment in my country is almost 100 per cent. We do not have more recent statistics, but it is important to underscore that efforts have been made for almost two years now to increase enrolment and retention in both primary and secondary schools — but especially in secondary schools, where enrolment rates are below 100 per cent.

Third, gender equality indicators have improved. It is interesting to note that the primary school enrolment rate is the same for boys and girls, and that there are 10 per cent more young women than men enrolled in secondary schools. Women now make up 40 per cent of the members of parliament, thanks to affirmative action laws that establish minimum gender quotas. The rate of women's participation in the labour force rose from 35 to 40 per cent between 2000 and 2005. However, female unemployment also increased in the same period, from 6.8 to 9.6 per cent.

Fourth, between 2000 and 2005, infant mortality dropped from 10.4 to 9.5 deaths per 100,000 live births, while under-five mortality dropped from 2.4 to 2 per 1,000 inhabitants.

Fifth, on average, maternal mortality remained the same between 2000 and 2005, namely, 3.4 per 10,000 live births.

Sixth, in the same period, the rate of mortality from HIV/AIDS dropped from 3 to 2.7 per 100,000, with tuberculosis deaths dropping from 3 to 1.3 per 100,000. With regard to malaria, we have data available only until 2003, by which deaths from the disease had dropped from 1.4 in 2000 to 0.5 per 1,000 inhabitants.

Seventh, there are fewer indicators on ensuring the sustainability of the environment. The most relevant thing is that the percentage of the population with access to water remained at 97.4 per cent in the years 2000 and 2005. At the same time, the percentage of people with access to potable water rose from 75 per cent in 2000 to 82.3 per cent in 2005. Moreover, in 2007, our country experienced net growth in forested land, following decades of deforestation.

As can be observed, and as the human development index indicates, Costa Rica is a country with a high level of social development. Coverage for health and education services is nearly 100 per cent. Our already high rates in the health area are continuing to improve. Nevertheless, the problem of reducing — and much less, eradicating — poverty has not yet been solved. As I said, the poverty rate remained the same in

the first six years of this millennium. It was only in 2007 that a meaningful improvement was apparent.

The current Government has refocused its efforts to that end, without sacrificing other areas of development. To the contrary, we have strengthened infrastructure, both as regards roads and communications in general. That has been possible through improved tax collection and a more effective allocation of public funds, at a time when the economy experienced sustained growth in recent years at an average annual rate of 6 per cent or more. By reaching the goals that have been set and maintaining the achievements of the past two years, Costa Rica will be in a position to say that it is on track to achieve the 2010 goals and prepared to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, including the most elusive and perhaps most important goal of all: reducing poverty to 10 per cent of the population by 2015, and hopefully reducing it even further.

In order to achieve all that, however, it is necessary to continue policies that keep economic growth at an annual rate of 6 per cent or more, in a way consistent with improving the environment as regards air quality, waste disposal and greenhouse gas reduction. Costa Rica intends to be a carbon-neutral country by 2021. Everything to which I have referred presupposes that there will be high quality governance in the context of a democratic system that increasingly involves citizens as the managers of development.

Mr. Acharya (Nepal): The President of the General Assembly deserves our appreciation for convening this timely debate on the progress made towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In the Millennium Declaration and at subsequent conferences, countries on either side of the development agenda made certain commitments. Developing countries would take ownership of their own development, provide good governance, improve their reform of the economic and social sectors and achieve certain indicators of development. Developed partners would provide the necessary resources and an enabling environment, including freer access to their markets, debt relief, capacity-building, technology transfer and sustained flows of investment.

Developing countries have made great strides, since those commitments were made, especially in poverty reduction and with regard to many other MDGs. But those achievements have been restricted to some regions and countries. The achievement of the MDGs in the world's poorest countries, where the so-called bottom billion are mostly concentrated, hangs precariously on the sustained flow of resources and the enabling environment to which we committed ourselves in those compacts.

Moreover, the achievement of the MDGs is threatened by the spread of HIV/AIDS, humanitarian crises, conflicts and the new challenges of climate change. The world's poor and hungry people are being further marginalized by increasing oil and food prices. The continuing deadlock in the negotiations of the Doha Development Agenda and the lack of a sustained flow of migrant workers from the developing to the developed world continues to stymie the opportunities that the market could offer to boost their efforts in achieving the MDGs.

When we adopted the MDGs and the Monterrey Consensus, we did not take into account the threat of climate change, especially the urgent need for adaptation in the most vulnerable countries. How that can be done without diverting the resources committed to their development should be considered seriously in the forthcoming review of the Monterrey Consensus.

Whereas it is important that the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness should be implemented in order to achieve better results, it cannot substitute for sustained flows of additional resources to developing countries. It has become clear that without the sincere fulfilment of the commitments made by developed countries, the MDGs cannot be fully attained in the time remaining.

Poverty reduction is central to all the MDGs. We cannot possibly think of achieving the other goals without reducing poverty. Failure in poverty reduction would mean that millions of people will continue to languish in crippling poverty and hunger on less than $1 a day, even after 2015. That is unacceptable in a world that has so many resources at its disposal and that spends so much on armaments and luxury.

The panellists have clearly pointed out what works for poverty reduction and other MDGs. Today, it is clear that growth alone cannot guarantee that we will achieve the MDGs. Despite the sound economic growth of the past six years, many African countries are still far away from achieving their MDG targets.

Growth must be accompanied by targeted investment, such as in the agriculture and social sectors.

It is important to mention here that the achievement of all the internationally agreed development goals, especially the compacts on the countries with special situations, is crucial to meeting the MDGs. For example, this year we are reviewing the Almaty Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries. Similarly, last year we reviewed the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. The recommendations of those reviews should be implemented with all the seriousness they deserve.

Nepal has achieved mixed progress in the attainment of the MDGs. Despite the past 12 years of internal conflict, there has been substantive progress in poverty reduction. Nepal's rate of poverty dropped from 42 per cent in 1996 to 31 per cent in 2004. The current interim development plan, for the period 2008 to 2010, aims at reducing poverty to below 24 per cent. We are therefore on track to achieving the goal of halving poverty by 2015.

Reports have shown that we have made great strides in achieving universal primary enrolment, with 85 per cent of our children attending school, as compared to 64 per cent in 1990. We may achieve that target as well. There has also been good progress with regard to health-related MDGs. The under-five child mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio have been reduced substantially. But we have yet to make substantive progress in combating HIV/AIDS.

Although Nepal has been able to maintain macroeconomic stability, both the population growth rate and growth rate of our gross domestic product have hovered around 2 per cent, straining our efforts to achieve the MDGs. Nepal's interim plan for the period 2008 to 2010 aims at reducing poverty and achieving 5.5 per cent annual economic growth. It also seeks to integrate the MDGs into the national development strategy. But we are constrained by our huge post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction needs. We are confident that our development partners will continue to support us in these endeavours.

We hope that the ongoing political transformation process, including the forthcoming elections to the constituent assembly on 10 April of this year, will pave the way forward for further accelerating our efforts in achieving the MDGs, while creating an environment for long-term peace, development and stability in the country.

In conclusion, the success of MDGs will be judged by their implementation. At this crucial halfway point, we have an opportunity for soul-searching and retrospection to find ways for better implementation in the remaining time. We should not engage in the business of reinventing the wheel or restating the obvious. We need a strategy for better implementation of our commitments, and perhaps a mechanism to monitor the commitments made by both sides. We must not miss the opportunity to fine-tune our commitments, with a view to achieving the full implementation of the MDGs by 2015. That is how partnership — global partnership for development — counts.

Nepal looks forward to actively participating in the review, including the high-level event on the midterm review of the MDGs on 25 September of this year.

Mr. Towpik (Poland): I would like to fully associate myself with the statement delivered yesterday by the Ambassador of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. Allow me to add a few remarks from the Polish perspective.

We do recognize that now, at the midpoint on our way to 2015, the international community needs to step up efforts aimed at the timely achievement of the commitments undertaken in 2000. That is why Poland decided to join the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Call to Action Declaration, which was presented in July 2007 on the initiative of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. We believe that the high-level meeting on the MDGs to be held in September 2008 bringing together all stakeholders — Governments, the business sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations and faith-based groups — will provide a good opportunity to assess the progress made so far. We hope, as well, that this meeting will be a strong incentive to speed up our joint efforts to achieve the MDGs.

Thanks to our success in the field of political and economic transformation, Poland has been assuming a new role in the international arena. We have become a donor country. Our participation and engagement in international development cooperation and in supporting countries undergoing social and economic transformation has been growing systematically. We have taken up the commitment of increasing our

official development assistance (ODA) and have set a target of devoting 0.17 per cent of our gross national income to ODA by 2010. We have been making steady and concrete progress towards that goal. As a result, in 2006, the volume of Polish ODA increased by 40 per cent, as compared to 2005, and amounted to almost 0.1 per cent of our gross national income, or almost $300 million. At the same time that we are scaling up our development assistance, we are strongly supporting the principles of aid effectiveness as defined in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and in the European Consensus on Development.

We share the view that our response to climate change should be seen in the context of a development agenda. Climate change has the most devastating effect on the poorest and most vulnerable, and it makes achievement of the development goals more difficult. Addressing the challenge of climate change also means addressing a wide range of issues of development, health, demographic change and natural disasters. Indeed, any integrated approach to achieving sustainable development must include measures connected with the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

With this approach in mind, Poland is particularly honoured to host the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will take place in December in Poznan. The conference will sum up the achievements of the Convention and the results attained within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol.

We would like to ensure that the conference in Poznan makes an important contribution to setting out specific measures in the scope of climate change mitigation and adaptation. At the Poznan conference, we will want to draw special attention to the issue of modern technology and technology transfers to developing countries, as well as to measures related to adaptation to climate change and, in particular, to the principles and functioning of the Adaptation Fund. A United Nations conference will be an excellent forum for demonstrating existing good practices and possibilities in the field of technology transfer and adaptation measures. The Poznan conference should also be an important milestone towards reaching consensus on differentiated commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the Copenhagen conference in 2009.

Mr. Lima (Cape Verde) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate Assembly President Srgjan Kerim for the opportunity he has afforded us to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Cape Verde associates itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Group of African States.

I cannot fail to welcome the interesting initiative of Mr. Robert Zoellick, former United States Trade Representative and now President of the World Bank, to ask wealth funds to invest 1 per cent in poor countries. This would allow us to accrue $30 billion for Africa. He believes that this is a long-term investment, and that a long-term investment is more sustainable than debt. I also wanted to note this because I thought that it was a very interesting initiative and was relevant to our discussions.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not a panacea. They give us the opportunity to think about development issues taken together, both at national and international levels. We must build solid ongoing ties in the various spheres of action, power and dialogue so that we may complete our common endeavours.

Achieving the MDGs, of course, depends first of all on our countries taking ownership of them and shouldering our responsibility. But this is also — and especially — a shared responsibility in the context of globalization. Responsibility means overall political will, which involves the strengthening of partnerships, external debt relief for developing countries and the increasing of official development assistance (ODA). The Millennium Development Goals will remain incomplete if we do not imbue them with the values of partnership, interdependence and solidarity.

To talk about the Millennium Development Goals is, first and foremost, to talk about three things: political will, partnership and interdependence. Political will is part of development, just as change is a part of life. Nothing can be done without meeting this rational requirement. In Cape Verde, we have always thought that a country such as ours, which is small and poor, cannot let itself be unstable and unpredictable as well. We became accustomed to this fact early on through our past of slavery, colonial domination and cyclical famine; we developed the habit of thinking about our common future, of dreaming about change and working for the common good. Since

independence, in 1975, owing to our catastrophic social, economic and environmental situations, we have set priorities and defined a vision of our own future.

We have focused on education and health for all and created the conditions to attain them. We recognized early that we were all equal before the law. And early on, we placed gender high on our State-building agenda. We have edified the rule of law and promoted modern justice that is progressively independent, and we have worked for the advent of democracy.

Through successive administrations, we have observed in our country that transparent elections can be held without major problems. Complaints are examined by tribunals, and Supreme Court decisions are respected. Good political and economic governance has enabled us to develop a healthy economy, and we are in a positive phase which saw our country come out of the category of least developed countries into that of middle-income countries in January of this year.

We have just been accepted into the World Trade Organization and have established a special partnership with the European Union which we hope will give us greater economic stability as well as more possibilities for investment in sustainable development. Of course, we are also strengthening our South-South relationships.

The figures speak for themselves. In the last few years, under-five mortality has gradually gone down from 56 per 1,000 in 1998 to 39 per 1,000 in 2000 and to 33 per 1,000 in 2005. We can affirm that infant mortality has been reduced by almost 41 per cent. But the objective set by the MDGs is to reduce this figure to 18.7 per 1,000 live births.

Since the 1990s, maternal death rates have been steadily decreasing, from 30 deaths per 1,000 in 2003 to 14.5 per 1,000 in 2005. Taking as a reference point the maternal mortality rate in 1995, which was 69 per 1,000, the goal is to bring this rate down to 17.3 by 2015. We can affirm that in Cape Verde we surpassed this objective in 2005. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Cape Verde was 0.8 per cent in 2005.

We have made progress towards a sustainable environment. The percentage of the population with access to water was 42 per cent in 1990; it increased to 82 per cent in 2005. We think that it will increase to 91 per cent in 2015. Bearing in mind the overall objectives stipulated for this sector, we can affirm that Cape Verde had already surpassed its objective in 2004. We are focusing on quality for the future. Efforts will have to be made to prevent wasting water in agriculture and to provide more and cheaper water for people, especially for the poorest.

With regard to the development of a global partnership for development, in order for our country to meet all the MDGs by 2015 and to avoid backsliding towards negative socio-economic indicators, it is important that the volume of official development assistance should not decrease in the coming years. It will be necessary to build partnerships with the countries of the North and to strengthen South-South cooperation in order to eliminate the deficits that continue to exist with regard to the provision of health and educational services and to provide basic infrastructure to the neediest. We emphasize the need for ongoing initiatives to lighten, reduce or eliminate debt.

We still have political will, which is crucial to making progress. However, our geographic vulnerabilities, which stem from the fact that we are an archipelago with the intrinsic determinants of an archipelago, from desertification and from a lack of natural resources, mean that trade on unequal terms is a factor that can wipe out our development completely.

Partnership implies an awareness that the exchange of goods, which is trade, requires fair prices, the taking into account of everyone's interests and, above all, the willingness to end trade on unequal terms. Trade on unequal terms has continued into the twenty-first century. Who would dare to say that all is well in the best of all possible worlds when poor countries do not control the prices of their products, when competition is distorted by subsidies that perpetuate the poverty of the farmers in the South, when all the efforts made by the Governments of the non-oil-producing countries of the South to achieve development and good governance are nullified by the repercussions caused by the dizzying increases in the price of oil and imported consumer goods, and when the alleviation or cancellation of public debt merely occurs in dribs and drabs? Are international trade structures adapted to the new requirements of the balanced partnership that we all advocate? Are those structures adapted to the efforts made by developing countries to achieve the Millennium Development

Goals, especially by least developed, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries? Documents issued by various United Nations agencies, independent organizations and well-regarded research scientists reveal that there is manifest inadequacy and that there are enormous possibilities yet to be explored or utilized in order to achieve a better understanding of reality and take decisive steps in the right direction.

Partnership is not the perpetuation of the domination of the weakest by the strongest. Neither does it mean the imposition of norms, structures and categories that only serve to promote the interests of some to the detriment of others or to enslave rather than to facilitate development, progress and liberation. What I am talking about here and now is the long genocide of children in the decaying neighbourhoods of our large cities, who search through garbage cans for something to eat instead of going to school, who become intoxicated with marijuana or inhale glue in order to forget that society has forgotten them and who become drunk with their own degeneration, in a world where justice and opportunities are reserved for others.

Someone spoke about the rights of children. But the State where the rule of law prevails, of which we are so proud, contains pockets of humanity without rights, where children become adults too fast and die without having enjoyed childhood. If Voltaire's Candide were alive today, he would certainly be surprised at our speeches and words, at our "urbi et orbi" proclamations of our progress — progress ensnared by the shameful reality of our times. For today, when innovative technologies have created or permitted orbiting satellites that can be destroyed from hundreds of kilometres away, genetic manipulation and surrogate motherhood, cluster bombs and distance or targeted killing, to use jargon that has become banal, the shameful reality is that millions of children are dying simply because they are hungry or because they lack treatment for non-lethal illnesses for which we have cures. Others die during childbirth or are destined for a future without prospects. If by chance they survive, they will end up living in the slums that surround our cities or in refugee camps or they will take their chances on some makeshift craft lured by the mirage of illegal immigration. Their futures are predetermined. Hope is a meaningless word for the members of this generation, who are headed for violence and a precarious life without a future, a life that is marked out for an early death.

How long will we be able to live with that reality? What does development mean when seen through the prism of abject poverty? Of course we are all making efforts. Of course we have the MDGs. But do we thereby inspire conviction or do we create uncertainty? We all have at our disposal figures, which each of us can verify in the reports disseminated throughout the world. But who can tell us once and for all how to put an end to child hunger and malnutrition, the death that permeates all our undertakings, given that we are living in a system that disregards the majority, perpetuates terrifying injustice and ensures that as a society evolves and makes growth its guiding principle, the number of poor people increases somewhere? Should growth be based on the perpetuation of poverty? The imbalances are too glaring to be ignored. How can we invest billions of dollars in endless wars when a mere portion of that astronomical amount would reduce poverty, end extreme poverty, vanquish the illnesses that afflict the poorest countries and save millions of children from certain death? And that is to say nothing of the challenges posed by climate change, which could be addressed more effectively.

Interdependence is the reality of today. We live in a multipolar globalized world. It is therefore by definition an interdependent world. Obvious imbalances of course exist but, along the way, each one of us will defend interests and benefits which will also be the interests of all and represent benefits for all. Interdependence is the nexus between North-South relations and South-South cooperation. It is where public and private spheres come together to nurture development projects. However, interdependence must also mean equal opportunity, access to financing, debt reduction, technology transfers and the continuation of assistance to those in need. We are here at the United Nations as both stakeholders in and promoters of interdependence. All Members should assume their responsibilities in that regard and proceed to building peace, facilitating exchanges in a spirit of solidarity and effectively participating in the search for peace, for the future of the planet requires it.

Is there life after the MDGs? We want to believe that there is. For if we want to end hunger and poverty and war and violence, we must all work to maintain political will, to continue partnership in a spirit of

solidarity and to strengthen interdependence, for the challenges confronting the planet in this century defy our imagination and our intelligence. I know that together we can succeed, for this is about the future of the world and of humankind.

Mr. Kim Hyun Chong (Republic of Korea): Midway to the target year of 2015 set for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), my delegation believes that the thematic debate that we are having today could not be more timely and helpful in reinvigorating our efforts to achieve those noble Goals. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express my warmest appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this important meeting.

During our discussion, it has been noted that, while significant progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs, such progress has been uneven and slow among regions. As the President mentioned in his opening statement, however, we could emerge victorious and meet most, if not all, of the MDGs by 2015, if we take urgent action with more commitment and dedication. Without a doubt, global partnership will be an essential framework to drive us towards the Goals. It will be equally important for developing countries to make further efforts to align their national development strategies and priorities with the MDGs.

The balance sheet at the midpoint shows that progress towards achieving the goal of halving the proportion of people who suffer from extreme poverty and hunger has been uneven from region to region. While the ratio of extreme poverty decreased from 28 per cent in 1990 to 19 per cent in 2005, particular concern has been raised with regard to some regions, such as Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, which have lagged behind in attaining the goal. Efforts to alleviate the suffering of extreme poverty should be redoubled in those regions.

With population growth, many more millions of people are faced with the danger of being relegated to poverty again. Malnutrition also remains a serious problem. Most disheartenigly, 143 million children under the age of five in the developing world continue to suffer from inadequate nutrition. Such malnutrition of children is particularly alarming because it could lead to a succession of poverty from generation to generation.

In addition, recent unprecedented price hikes for basic food and energy add more complexity to attaining the goal of eradicating poverty and hunger. As is well known, the World Food Programme recently issued an extraordinary emergency appeal, amounting to $500 million, to address the critical funding gap created by soaring food and fuel prices. Urgent scaling up of financial resources will be essential to counter these emerging challenges.

In accordance with the pledge made at the 2005 World Summit, the Republic of Korea is in the process of substantially increasing our official development assistance (ODA). My delegation also believes that innovative sources of financing for development could be very important supplementary resources for development cooperation. In that connection, last year the Korean Government introduced an air ticket solidarity levy. The funds raised by the levy will be used to fight poverty and epidemic diseases in least developed countries, in particular in the African region. In that regard, my delegation believes that the issue of innovative sources of development finance should be duly discussed at the relevant forums, including the forthcoming Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development, to be held late this year.

Well-educated human resources are crucial for national development. Education is also essential in ensuring human dignity and the basic rights of the individual. Achieving universal primary education is therefore not only an issue of development but also closely related to the promotion of basic human rights. Education has played a pivotal role in promoting and sustaining my country's economic growth. According to the lessons we have learned, education is also a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development and building a more stable and democratic society.

The Korean Government is fully aware of the importance of education. It has therefore given high priority to the provision of education in our development cooperation policy. About 60 per cent of our ODA has been directed to programmes aimed at developing social capital. My Government invites several hundred trainees every year from developing countries and dispatches experts with various skills abroad for cooperation in the fields of capacity development.

Gender equality in education is another critical element for achieving the MDGs. Even though the

gender parity goal set for 2005 has been missed, I note that 118 out of the 188 countries with available data are on track to achieve, or have already achieved, gender parity at the primary level. We need to do more to achieve gender equality in education, because it is unthinkable to promote the MDGs without the full participation of women in the development process.

The Republic of Korea welcomes the various initiatives at the global and regional levels to eradicate epidemic diseases, including malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Far too many human lives, especially among the younger generations, are lost to epidemic diseases. Beyond their terrible toll in human lives, those diseases also undermine the development efforts of the international community. As an effort to contribute in this area, my Government is also participating in the activities of the International Drug Purchase Facility, which was established to support the fight against the three major diseases of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

It is encouraging to note that progress in fighting epidemic diseases has been supported by a substantial increase in donations by international actors. While more resources are still required, my delegation shares the view that we need to ensure coordination and cooperation among various actors in this area to avoid fragmentation, inefficiency and duplication.

The eight Millennium Development Goals are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. An integrated and multifaceted approach should be employed to achieve MDGs by 2015. In that regard, my delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that progress can only be achieved if all actors are energized.

Before I conclude, I would like to reiterate the strong commitment and willingness of my Government to make the utmost effort to achieve the MDGs.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In reviewing the progress made at the halfway point towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we sincerely recognize the positive results recorded in many aspects of life throughout the world that have brought about improved livelihoods for millions of people, as reported in the related discussion materials for this meeting. However, a closer look and more careful analysis of the challenges ahead of us, particularly those contained in background papers on poverty and hunger and health and education, reminds us that much more remains to be done, and greater efforts must be made, if our promise to accomplish the eight MDGs by 2015 is to be kept. That also applies to the case of Viet Nam.

Following the adoption of the 2000 Millennium Declaration, with a high sense of responsibility, Viet Nam adapted the eight MDGs into 12 Viet Nam-specific development goals to be achieved by 2010. Those goals are focused on social issues and the elimination of poverty, and the entire nation has made an all-out effort to achieve them. Our poverty rate has been reduced sharply: from 58.1 per cent in 1993 to 24.1 per cent 2004 and 14.7 per cent in 2007. That has allowed our country to attain MDG 1 far ahead of schedule.

With regard to education, currently more than 99 per cent of Viet Nam's six-year-old children attend primary school. We are therefore confident that Viet Nam will achieve MDG 2 between 2010 and 2015.

With regard to gender equality and an improved status for women, the gender gap has been noticeably and significantly narrowed at all levels of education, with female students now comprising at least 46.8 per cent of enrolment. Women also have an enhanced role in the employment market, including in all areas of activity.

Viet Nam remains the leader in Asia in terms of female parliamentarian membership. It is therefore likely that Viet Nam will fundamentally achieve MDG 3 before 2015.

In the field of health, by 2007, Viet Nam had succeeded in reducing the rates of maternal mortality to 80 per 100,000. We have also reduced under-five mortality to 27.5 per 1,000 and the under-one mortality rate to 16 per 1,000. Having reduced 4.5-fold malaria morbidity and 9-fold malaria mortality during the period from 1995 to 2004, Viet Nam can now claim to have relatively effectively controlled this disease. With that in mind, we have reason to be optimistic with regard to achieving most of the requirements set for Goals 4, 5 and 6. However, the current rapid spread and complicated development of HIV/AIDS, which has resulted in increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS carriers, and — more seriously — the continued trend of

HIV/AIDS complications now put us at risk of failing to meet Goal 6.

We are heartened to report that Viet Nam has also scored positive gains in our efforts to ensure environmental sustainability, through, inter alia, increasing forest land coverage by 0.6 per cent annually, so that it now accounts for 39 per cent of the national land area; striving to conserve 11.6 per cent of natural land area by 2010; doubling the rate of access to clean water supply by the rural population; and raising the rate of urban waste collection to around 71 per cent.

With regard to the establishment of a global partnership for development, in accordance with our foreign policy of openness and proactive international integration, we have done our best to reach out to the world; improve our policies and legal systems; further attract and better use external resources; closely cooperate with foreign partners in designing and realizing strategies on employment for young people; provide low-cost essential medicines for the population; and intensify cooperation with the private sector to make full use of new technologies, particularly information and communications technologies. All of that testifies to the consistency of our foreign policy and the practice of Viet Nam being a friend and reliable partner of all countries in the international community, actively participating in international and regional cooperation.

On the way to 2015, bearing in mind the MDGs and their challenges as well as the need to have economic growth and social equity go hand in hand, the Vietnamese Government will continue with its pro-poor policy and strive for a more organic linkage between its poverty reduction strategy and sociopolitical development strategy and thus a more secure life for the population. To that end, Viet Nam counts on continued and greater cooperation and support from the international community, so that by 2015 we can join other Member States in celebrating the accomplishment of the eight MDGs. We support the joint declaration of 31 June 2007 by the Secretary-General and the British Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Gordon Brown, calling for an accelerated implementation of the MDGs.

We also hope that developed countries will fully implement their commitment to facilitating trade, allocating 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance, reducing and writing off debts for developing countries and transferring technology to the latter. In that connection, we strongly support the work of the United Nations in building a road map, followed by substantive steps, towards the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha at the end of 2008. Viet Nam stands ready to contribute constructively to that process.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Government of Belarus is firmly committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We clearly understand how to ensure prompt achievement of the MDGs in Belarus. One of the major factors in the success of our work is the fact that we have integrated the MDGs into State socio-economic development programmes. A systemic and consistent national approach to achieving the MDGs is yielding, even now, encouraging results. In the last six years, the number of people with an income under the basic minimum has decreased fourfold in our country. We have paid particular attention to creating new jobs and decreasing the unemployment rate, which is now at only 1 per cent of the working population. We see good progress in education. The percentage of women receiving primary, secondary and higher education is even higher than the percentage of men. We have achieved significant progress in combating disease and child mortality. Since 1990, infant mortality has been halved. The infant mortality rate in Belarus is the lowest among the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and our maternal mortality rate is the same as that of developed countries.

In our work to achieve the MDGs, Belarus appreciates the invaluable support of the United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF, first and foremost in overcoming the lingering consequences of one of the greatest technological tragedies in the history of mankind: Chernobyl.

Moreover, as a middle-income country, Belarus largely relies on its own strengths. We are well aware of the limited volume of financial resources allocated for development. In our view, a significant increase in the volume of those resources, first and foremost for those countries needing them the most, could only partially be the result of a collective encouragement or incentive. We believe that an important factor in such

growth is for Member States with special historical conditions that put them in a more privileged position to reach a critical mass of goodwill and empathy for the problems of those who, to a large extent, need the international community's assistance. That is what limits the opportunities for the United Nations to stimulate such positive processes.

However, the Organization's options are far from exhausted in terms of promoting, consistent with Charter principles, the rejection of politically motivated pressure and unilateral economic coercion in relations between States. While the majority of speakers in this debate have talked about looking for new opportunities and potential to strengthen support for national efforts to meet the MDGs, my country today is concerned with the harm already done to the MDG process by the unilateral economic sanctions introduced against Belarus by one Member State.

The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council regularly adopt resolutions calling on States to lift export subsidies, politically motivated unilateral sanctions and other measures hindering economic growth in developing countries. Today we have the right to state that, as one of the many items on the agenda of the General Assembly, this problem is becoming a serious factor hampering the achievement of the MDGs. Therefore, in our view, the Secretary-General, as the chief administrative officer of the Organization, has a mandate entitling him to actively speak out against the unfairly restricted access of products to the markets of developed countries, unilateral politically motivated sanctions and other measures hindering economic growth.

Today we have all the justification we need to more vigorously present the position of the United Nations on this issue to States adopting such measures and to make efforts to get them lifted, including during meetings with representatives of such States. We believe that in the country and regional programmes of the UNDP and other specialized agencies, we need to contemplate measures to provide programme countries with the technical and other assistance they need to minimize the impact of such unfairly restricted access of their products to the markets of developed countries, of politically motivated unilateral sanctions and other measures that hinder economic growth in developing countries. That type of assistance, among other things, could involve expertise and recommendations for a more appropriate and effective response by countries to measures hindering their economic growth and for adapting to such measures and minimizing their negative consequences.

We see serious potential in such steps, along with an important role for the United Nations system in providing a just environment for multilateral partnerships in the interest of development and in guaranteeing our common success in achieving the MDGs.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to start by thanking President Kerim for convening this timely debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Mexico, on behalf of the Rio Group. In addition, we would like to make some comments from our national perspective.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are based on the commitment to promote a world association for development, a covenant between the poor countries, which commit to reducing poverty, and the richer world, which agrees to shoulder the responsibility of being an active partner in support of the initiatives of the developing countries. The MDGs are a set of internationally agreed objectives that can be reached if all those concerned work together and we each do our part.

Originating with the Millennium Declaration, the MDGs are now playing a central role both within the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, and in civil society as benchmarks for measuring the efforts made at various levels to combat poverty. The Secretary-General has indicated that for the first time in its history humanity has the resources, knowledge and capacity to eradicate poverty, and he has urged us to maintain and enhance the momentum generated by the Millennium Declaration. Now that we are halfway towards the 2015 deadline, it is clear that remarkable progress has been achieved in many areas.

However, there is still a great deal to be done. Every country participating in this global commitment has, in conjunction with the international bodies, adapted the international goals to its own social and political situation. Goals, targets and indicators have been redefined and established at the national level, so that States can achieve the MDGs.

In Argentina, the promotion of decent work has also been incorporated as a goal, since studies and analysis have shown that unemployment, informal employment and under-utilization of the labour force are the principal underlying causes of the social crisis in Argentina. Furthermore, the studies also demonstrated that these phenomena are, to a large extent, responsible for Argentina's high rate of poverty and extreme poverty.

In my country, responsibility for following up on the MDGs has been assigned to the National Council of Social Policy Coordination which directly depends on the presidency.

Argentina, like other middle-income countries, is characterized by, among other things, deficit-related internal imbalances and structural vulnerabilities, which are made worse by the inequities of the international system.

Argentina is a federal State consisting of 23 provinces and the autonomous city of Buenos Aires. This makes for a mosaic of situations and functions with varying human development results. There are regions in our country where there is a high human development level and other regions whose human development level is akin to what you might find in the poorest countries of Latin America. Given the federal nature of the State, several provinces decided to define their own goals and elaborate their own performance indicators. The country has made progress towards the MDGs. However, despite some encouraging results, we note from the indicators diverse performances across provinces and regions. We must therefore craft strategies that are consistent with national plans and programmes and provide better public service.

In all areas of public policy, our actions systematically refer to the MDGs. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that quantitative indices that measure achievement of the Goals are not sufficient, since inequality cuts across all sectors and dimensions of development. This is why issues such as human rights and the gender perspective cut across all the Goals. Only if they are successfully integrated will we achieve equity for all.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat the words spoken by the President of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, when she took office and addressed the Legislative Assembly:

> "We must each ask ourselves what, over and above our duties as citizens, we can do every day to be a little better and thus live in a better country. This does not imply a diminution of responsibility; rather, it means that everyone should assume his or her share of responsibility for building a different society. But institutions and society will only acknowledge each other when they are successful in improving the quality of life of the people."

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to President Kerim for organizing this important debate on progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The MDGs have been a powerful mobilizing force for focusing global and national action on improvement of the well-being of people around the world. This meeting provides the opportunity to review and discuss the implementation of the MDGs and to pave the way for a successful convening of the high-level meeting on the MDGs in September 2008. In my remarks today, I would like to share Afghanistan's experience towards fulfilling the MDGs.

In 2000, when the Member States adopted the Millennium Declaration and committed themselves to endorsing the MDGs in a time-bound manner, Afghanistan was embroiled in armed conflict. In March 2004, my Government committed itself to achieving the MDGs within a time-bound period. As a late entrant to global development efforts, the Afghan Government has extended its MDGs timeline from 2015 to 2020 due to a quarter of a century of conflict and our inability to join this global effort in 2000.

Lack of available data has posed unique problems as regards reliable baselines from which to set targets. Therefore most of the global targets have been "afghanized", which means that they have been revised to make them more relevant to Afghanistan. Moreover, in recognition of the interdependency of development and security, a ninth goal of "enhancing security" has been added to the MDGs.

The development policy framework of Afghanistan, which was established at the London Conference in January 2006, is aimed at enabling the MDGs to be achieved. At the London Conference, we launched our National MDGs Report, presented our

Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS) and adopted the Afghanistan Compact.

Notwithstanding the progress made towards the MDGs, many challenges still remain in the implementation of our goals. Allow me to highlight some of them.

With regard to Goal 1, related to poverty and hunger, since 2001 economic growth has not only been significant, but has also generated better livelihoods; gross domestic product per capita has increased 53 per cent over the past five years. However, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with an estimated 22 million Afghans — representing 70 per cent of the population — living in poverty; the figure is especially high in rural areas. Poverty and unemployment, both of which have contributed to the increase in terrorist activities in the country, could jeopardize the gains made over the past six years. We have accorded priority to addressing both in a sustainable and timely manner.

Regarding Goal 2, related to education, since 2001 nearly 7 million children — one third of whom are girls — have returned to schools. More than 3,500 schools have been built, and new curricula and textbooks have been developed for primary education. In addition, the number of teachers has increased sevenfold. However, a great number of children, particularly those living in rural areas, continue to face difficulties in gaining access to educational institutions. It is also important to mention the fact that the Taliban and Al-Qaida, during their campaign of terror, have attacked and intimidated teachers and students and have burned a large number of schools.

Concerning Goal 3, related to gender, significant progress has been achieved in empowering women in the political, economic and social areas. Women play an important role in the development and peace process in Afghanistan. However, many women still face obstacles. Among them are low rates of literacy and life expectancy, together with pregnancy-related complications, unemployment and insufficient access to education and health services.

As for Goals 4, 5 and 6 — to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, respectively — today, 81 per cent of the Afghan population has access to basic health services, and access to diagnostic and curative services has increased from almost none in 2002 to more than 40 per cent. The infant and maternal mortality rates have been reduced by 85,000 and 40,000 annually, respectively. We created our National HIV/AIDS Control Programme in 2004 to collect systematic data on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. However, close to 900 children under the age of 5 die daily, and more than 60 women die every day from pregnancy-related complications. Malaria is prevalent in more than 60 per cent of the country, and Afghanistan has the twelfth-largest tuberculosis burden in the world and the largest in South Asia.

Concerning Goal 7, related to the environment, in 2007 343 community water points were constructed in the parts of southern Afghanistan hit by drought and affected by conflict. The Government of Afghanistan has taken numerous initiatives to prevent environmental degradation. However, only 23 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, and most of the diseases afflicting the population are caused by a lack of drinkable water.

Regarding Afghanistan's own goal 9, related to security, the lack of security caused by the Taliban and Al-Qaida in the southern parts of Afghanistan is a major obstacle to economic and social development. The achievement of our MDGs depends solely on the provision of security for our people. Afghanistan has added this new goal, which includes targets related to disarmament, demining and counter-narcotics. We would like to place emphasis on the need to provide technical and financial assistance to our security institutions in order to contribute to the rule of law and advance the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process and counter-narcotics efforts.

A major portion of Afghanistan's national development resources is currently being provided by the international community. Therefore, our partnership with the donor community is key to ensuring the implementation of our National Development Strategy, including the MDGs. In that regard, it is important to mention the following constraints on the delivery of aid to Afghanistan and on efforts to ensure its effectiveness.

First, in overall terms, the volume of aid delivered to Afghanistan is lower than that delivered to other post-conflict settings. Secondly, there is a growing gap of billions of dollars between amounts pledged and amounts disbursed, which undermines the ability of our Government to undertake long-term

fiscal planning. Thirdly, nearly three quarters of this aid is disbursed outside the scope of our national budget, which creates a parallel system that undermines our Government's ownership and involves multiple levels of contractors that inflate costs and fail to build Afghan national capacity. Fourthly, the proportion of tied aid is three times that of untied aid, which affects our capability to plan and effectively implement our National Development Strategy.

By adopting the Afghanistan Compact, the international community committed itself to improving aid effectiveness in Afghanistan and to providing resources and support for the implementation of our Development Strategy, including the MDGs. We would like to take this opportunity to remind the donor community to fulfil its commitments under the Afghanistan Compact and to do the following: first, increase the level of official development assistance, particularly to countries emerging from conflict; secondly, translate pledges into commitments and therefore undertake more predictable and multi-year funding commitments; thirdly, provide its financial support through our national budget in order to reduce duplication and transaction costs and to strengthen national ownership; and, fourthly, deliver untied aid whenever possible and provide assistance within the framework of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Afghanistan is currently at the crucial stage of finalizing its National Development Strategy and entering its implementation phase. The Strategy will be launched during the international conference on Afghanistan to be held in Paris in June 2008. The Paris conference represents an opportunity for our international partners to renew their political and financial commitment to the implementation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and to the achievement of our MDGs. We expect that, at the Paris conference, the international community will continue its political and financial support to Afghanistan so that we can improve the lives of our people and stand on our own feet.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): A famous French writer once said that a goal without a plan is just a wish. Today, halfway through our 15-year quest to realize the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and faced with the possibility that we are not on track to achieve the Goals, we must ask ourselves a fundamental question: are the MDGs indeed goals, or are they simply an exercise in wishful thinking on a global scale? If the international community is serious and committed to achieving the MDGs by 2015, we must demonstrate the political courage to tackle the structural changes necessary to allow for meaningful global development.

This thematic debate cannot be an occasion for either international hand-wringing or international back-slapping. The twin outcomes of this debate must be a concrete multilateral plan for progress and an agreement on the areas of focus going forward.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is justifiably proud of its recent progress towards achieving and surpassing the MDGs. In the field of education, we have achieved universal access to both primary and secondary schools. Indeed, between 2001 and 2006, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines went from having only 39 per cent of its eligible children attending secondary schools to achieving universal access to secondary education. We are implementing a many-sided poverty reduction strategy that includes policies to stimulate growth, trade and development, increase employment opportunities, invest in human capital and improve social and physical infrastructure.

On the health front, infant mortality continues its downward trend, and we are on track to meet our 2015 target. A multifaceted wellness revolution is under way to combat a host of preventable lifestyle diseases, and the Government has also instituted comprehensive programmes to combat HIV/AIDS, although the challenges posed by that deadly disease remain daunting.

But the successes and challenges of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, much like those of our sister States throughout the developing world, cannot be viewed in the context of individual national plans and discrete examples of progress or failure. In our progress towards the MDGs, we have reached the point where future plans for their achievement must take on global and structural dimensions. Developing countries, with very few exceptions, have worked assiduously and in relative isolation towards their MDG targets. The uneven progress to date has shown the limitations of those disjointed, individual approaches.

In that regard, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines wholeheartedly echoes the calls made yesterday by India, Jamaica, Morocco, Pakistan, the Group of 77 and many others for an emphasis on the critical

importance of Goal 8 — develop a global partnership for development. That neglected and unappreciated Goal is indeed a prerequisite for and the fulcrum of meaningful development.

Six years ago, very early in the MDG process, world leaders gathered in Monterrey and stated:

> "Our goal is to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth and promote sustainable development as we advance to a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system". (*A/CONF.198/11, resolution 1, para. 1*)

Part and parcel of that noble goal was a renewal of developed States' long-standing pledge to give 0.7 per cent of their gross national product as official development assistance. Today, we are no closer to that modest assistance target, which was first mooted in 1969, before the challenges of climate change, the digital divide or the special development issues of the post-cold-war and post-9/11 world.

Our global partnership for development has thus far failed to extend to the realm of substantive and far-reaching forgiveness of debts that have been paid many times over. Nor has it fashioned ways in which a debtor nation can satisfy its obligations to creditors by reallocating its debt-servicing dollars towards mutually agreed domestic development projects. Furthermore, our global partnership has yet to meaningfully tackle the imposition of trade-distorting barriers and subsidies, which short-sightedly serve the gods of local political expediency.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines urges renewed consideration and emphasis on Goal 8, not in the context of welfare colonialism or conditionality, but in a manner that empowers developing States and dismantles the mechanisms of underdevelopment. The developing world is not underdeveloped because we were waiting for the United Nations to enumerate eight MDGs for our collective benefit; we are underdeveloped because of a complex structural process and norms that reinforce systemic inequalities. It is impossible to meaningfully address development without having the political courage to tackle those structural biases.

Achievement of the MDGs has become a Holy Grail at the United Nations, even though the Goals themselves, while vital, are minimal benchmarks that will not close the yawning development gap between core and peripheral States. Indeed, as the developing world has moved haltingly towards the MDGs, our developed partners have consolidated their advantages in terms of health, wealth, education, technology and productivity.

For example, no one in this Hall can seriously suggest that a primary education or mere literacy can be the basis upon which States' populations compete in a globalized economy. Without universal secondary and widespread tertiary education, and without technological and information literacy, developing States will continue to be hewers of wood and drawers of water and will remain trapped in entrenched inequality. The MDGs are therefore not final goals, but merely an essential first step in attaining the minimal basis for meaningful development. In that regard, we must begin to envisage the next 15 years of development goals, even as we wrestle with our current targets.

We in the United Nations cannot simply speak the MDGs into existence; our words must be accompanied by action. Our endless graphs, charts and MDG projections must result in paradigm-altering structural adjustments in trade, assistance and cooperation. With all the ink, paper and words that have been expended on the MDGs, we must collectively accept their achievement as a measure of the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations in tackling global ills. The last steps towards realizing the MDGs cannot be taken merely on an ad hoc basis by States acting individually. We must have the vision to plan, and the courage to act, in a manner that fulfils our moral, ethical and human obligations to our fellow citizens.

Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands): I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this thematic debate, especially at a time when we have arrived at the midpoint for achieving the time-bound Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

I would like to begin by associating my national statement with the statements delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, by the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the least developed countries and by the representative of Tonga on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States.

For many vulnerable countries, the emphasis on achieving the MDGs has been overwhelming, so much so that discussions have sidelined the special situations

of the least developed countries, the landlocked developing countries and the small island developing States. Unfortunately, the Brussels Programme of Action for the least developed countries and the Barbados Programme of Action — which are supposed to be vehicles for the least advantaged to attain the MDGs — have been sidelined, not having been included in either regional or international country programmes to address their specific challenges. My delegation supports the call made by Barbados for the international community to support the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the Brussels Programme of Action for the least developed countries.

Solomon Islands remains off track to achieve the MDGs and is a country that is also emerging from a conflict situation. Many of the issues faced by small island countries are considered too small for the international system to handle; hence, those issues get swept under the carpet. To some extent, we have become invisible in the debate, in which we are seen but never mentioned in any of the discussions. None of the panellists referred to our subregion. Viewed in that light, this statement is about our quest for survival. Here, I would like to acknowledge the presidency's initiative to hold a special meeting for the most vulnerable and to express the hope that in future, we can be featured in the discussion.

The impact of climate change has increased poverty and requires new and additional resources. Droughts, flooding, sea-level rise and the frequency of cyclones continue to batter our narrow-based agricultural economies, reversing developments achieved over decades — within minutes in the case of tsunamis, and within hours in the case of cyclones. Although least developed countries and small island developing States are those least equipped to deal with climate change, it is stated too many times that, when it comes to action, we fail to honour our commitments. These developments have made it even more challenging for us to achieve the MDGs. The movement of people from low-lying islands to larger islands is already happening to various degrees across the country. A state of emergency has been declared in various parts of Solomon Islands, owing to food shortages resulting from natural calamities.

The high cost of food and the increased price of energy speak of the dilemma faced by least developed countries, which live on the fringes of the international system.

With regard to the issue of financing for development, it is important that we begin to look at some quick wins. For many of the small island developing States of the Pacific, energy accounts for a third of our national budgets. Securing adequate technology is a must to free up domestic resources to address all the MDGs. The valuing of forests for carbon credit purposes is a means of halting the unsustainable harvesting of forests, but it is also a means of providing alternative income for the population, as nearly 80 per cent of the land in Solomon Islands is customarily owned. In the health sector, treated bed nets save lives. That is especially important given that malaria remains the number-one killer in Solomon Islands. Moreover, HIV/AIDS is a time bomb for our young population.

Secondly, if we are to get back on track, there must be a change in approach by the United Nations system-wide. The United Nations must move from policy to developing on-the-ground activities. The usual practice of blaming policies and governance has gone on for so long that countries have become very open and flexible in accessing funds from partners. In most cases, that is done at the expense of focusing on national policies. There is a tendency to focus too much on the formal sector and to neglect the informal sector.

Thirdly, we must strengthen the linkage between the United Nations and its Member States. In that spirit, we need to look at situations in countries where there is no — or limited — United Nations presence and at what can be done, especially to facilitate North-South and South-South cooperation. Not to do so will create weak links within our global fight to eradicate poverty. Our multilateral system must take a more pragmatic and concrete approach to address the structural impediments that continue to marginalize poor countries from the international economic, financial and trade systems. There must be genuine change in the international financial and trade architecture to include least developed countries and small island developing States, especially in the agricultural sector. There is also a need to ensure inclusiveness and equal attention in reviewing all eight MDGs. In that connection, in terms of looking at all the MDGs in a holistic manner, my delegation would

once again like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the representative of India.

Fourthly, in connection with the panel discussion on poverty eradication, health and education, all those sectors need resources. My delegation acknowledges the support of our developed partners. However, sustainability in those sectors will require decisive public investment in resources directed at creating people-centred economic opportunities in the productive sectors of the economy. This issue is about partnership, and Goal 8 provides for it. We should discuss how we are going to sustain all Goals. That can only be done by doing more for trade than aid and by ensuring that Doha delivers and creates a just and fair international financial system.

There is also a need to address the issue of debt and to convert debts into MDG and Brussels Programme of Action projects, in addition to the energy and forestry proposals to which I referred earlier. In that connection, my delegation once again supports the call by the Philippines for the United Nations to seriously look at the debt equity concept for MDGs, especially in freeing up resources for sustainable development.

In conclusion, the success of the time-bound MDGs depends upon the degree to which we honour and operationalize our global commitment in all respects. The MDGs are about development, freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in human dignity.

Mrs. Gallardo Hernández (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of this thematic debate of the General Assembly, during which we have identified the achievements and challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. My delegation would like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

El Salvador has shouldered its political responsibility by structuring its national development plan to comprehensively comply with the Goals. We believe that building a more equitable society entails promoting social investment as a national priority, as well as the search for innovative multilateral financial mechanisms.

El Salvador believes that the multidimensional phenomenon of poverty is defined as a shortfall in income and a lack of access to education, health services and basic infrastructure services such as water, basic sanitation, electricity and rural roads. Likewise, poverty includes the lack of economic and social opportunities. As a result, my country has taken a series of steps aimed at achieving sustained economic growth, with social policies involving heavy investment in our people, while at the same time strengthening institutions through national consensus in order to lay the foundation for a more just society.

This is about an important political decision taken by my Government that has been implemented through efforts focused on areas where we can have the greatest impact on people living in extreme poverty. The main goal is to establish a safety net for the poorest and most marginalized of our people in order to close the gap between urban and rural areas. That commitment by the Government of El Salvador is reflected in the social plan known as Opportunidades, which entails a series of projects to serve the most vulnerable people in rural areas.

I should also mention our health solidarity fund, which strengthens and expands medical services; the Conéctate education programme, which sets up information and communication technology centres; the Jóvenes programme, which generates greater opportunities for the development, participation and comprehensive advancement of young people; and the Tu Crédito programme for seeking financial support. Likewise, I should also mention that through our solidarity network and a comprehensive policy that addresses education, health, nutrition and other basic services, the Government is providing support to families living in extreme poverty in rural areas.

In meeting its commitment, El Salvador has succeeded in reducing the rate of extreme poverty from 32.6 per cent to 12.5 per cent. The goal for 2015 was 16.3 per cent.

With regard to the goal on malnutrition, although we have succeeded in reducing its impact, we are nevertheless aware of the fact that this is one area in which we must step up our efforts in order to meet the goal by 2015. In particular, we must do so by reducing the number of malnourished children.

Our 2021 national education plan includes various initiatives, such as the Edúcame programme, which aims at facilitating basic and intermediate education through flexible schedules. Basic education

is provided through our educational networks, while our Juega Leyendo programme is devoted to universal preschool education. The Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programme has made it possible to make important progress in the area of adult literacy. All of this leads me to underscore the fact that El Salvador's education MDG indicators have improved substantially, having reached the 73 per cent mark. We genuinely hope to reach 100 per cent by 2015. Access to education is currently at a satisfactory level of gender balance.

In the area of health, our Ministry of Public Health has undertaken major programmes. The national family health plan guarantees access and equality services, in the provision of thus providing better primary health care. This improvement was possible thanks to a sharing of responsibility between families and local government. There has also been a reduction of the maternal mortality rate, from 173 per 100,000 live births to 55.3 in 2007. Infant mortality rates fell to 23.4 per 1,000 live births in 2006. We have increased vaccinations of minors and hope to be able to meet this goal as well by 2015.

The Government of El Salvador has decisively committed itself to combating HIV/AIDS. Through the network set up by the Ministry of Health, antiretroviral therapy has increased since 2001 and is provided to approximately 62 per cent of declared cases. El Salvador is doing everything it can in this effort, by actively participating in the Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

My country shares the view that in order to attain the MDGs towards the sustainable development of a country, we must take national and international elements into consideration. Solidarity of Governments is required and must be translated into balanced and equitable international cooperation. We know that for some countries, conditions are not favourable to achieving the MDGs by 2015. That is why it is extremely important that responsibility be shared and shouldered at the national level. While we recognize the significant contribution of developed countries, we must recall the need to continue increasing development assistance.

The search for this balance involves negotiating processes such as the Monterrey Consensus, with which we are currently very busy. We must also point out certain realities that have transformed development processes. We are referring in particular to the situation of middle-income countries. While this represents progress in national terms towards achieving the MDGs, it does not mean that development cooperation should be reduced.

The El Salvador Consensus on cooperation for the development of middle-income countries, the outcome of a conference my country hosted in October 2007, sets out the international community's commitment to achieving these internationally agreed development goals.

El Salvador reaffirms its continued commitment to be a partner in this joint reflection that President Kerim has convened. We believe that this debate will offer inspiration to the meeting of heads of State or Government to be held in September.

Mr. Raytchev (Bulgaria): At the outset, allow me to thank General Assembly President Kerim for organizing this extremely important meeting on the crucial midpoint in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Bulgaria fully aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. In my remarks today, I would like to elaborate on some important elements from a national perspective.

In the years since 2000, when the Millennium Declaration was endorsed, we have seen progress in achieving the MDGs even in those regions where the challenges are greatest. For example, the number of extremely poor people in sub-Saharan Africa has levelled off, and the poverty rate has declined by nearly six percentage points since 2000.

At the global level, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from nearly a third to less than one fifth between 1990 and 2004; enrolment in primary education grew from 80 per cent in 1991 to 88 per cent in 2000; child mortality rates have declined; and key interventions to control malaria and tuberculosis have been expanded.

These results are truly remarkable and important. However, they are still partial, and much more remains to be done. At present, only one of the eight regional groups cited in the MDG report is on track to achieve all the Goals. At the current rates of progress, the target of reducing by half the proportion of underweight

children will be missed, with approximately 30 million children still remaining at risk. Furthermore, the target of reducing the number of people who lack basic sanitation will fall short by almost 600 million people. In addition, new challenges — in particular, climate change, with its projected enormous economic and social impact — are expected to further impede progress towards the MDGs.

These estimates make it clear that the efforts to implement the MDGs should be drastically accelerated and in a coherent and coordinated manner. Therefore, all of us — developed and developing countries alike, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the private sector — need to work harder. Only coordinated and sustained efforts until 2015 will bring success. In this regard, every effort counts and every contribution matters.

I am glad to report here that Bulgaria too is striving to contribute, within its capacities, to the world's effort to eradicate global poverty and hunger. Development cooperation is not new for my country. In mid-1980s the Republic of Bulgaria was already a donor to over 40 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the 1990s, regardless of the difficulties of our own political and economic transition, Bulgaria continued to participate in several initiatives, assisting countries in need.

My country supported the decisions of the major United Nations conferences on international development issues, including the Millennium Summit, and the decision of the European Council of June 2005. We are committed to striving to achieve the targets of 0.17 per cent of gross national income (GNI) allocated for official development assistance by 2010 and 0.33 per cent of GNI by 2015. Our concept paper on the policy of the Republic of Bulgaria for participation in international development cooperation, adopted by the Council of Ministers in July 2007, has clearly stated our firm resolve to live up to these commitments. We are in the process of rebuilding, slowly but steadily, our national donor capacity, and we stand ready to share our experience with other countries undergoing a similar transition.

The eradication of poverty in all its dimensions and manifestations is the main objective of Bulgaria's development cooperation policy. Also among the sectoral priorities of our development assistance efforts are education; the implementation of health care reforms; the provision of assistance in socio-economic transition; development of infrastructure; environmental protection; security and post-conflict reconstruction; and the preservation of cultural diversity.

We also believe that improving the quality of aid is no less important for achieving the MDGs than increasing its volume. Thus, our development policy fully embraces the principles of ownership, alignment, accountability, coordination, complementarity and coherence laid down in the European Consensus on Development and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

We are closely following the preparations for the twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to be held in Accra, and stand ready to actively participate in the conference and to reflect its outcome in our development policy documents and practice.

In conclusion, let me reiterate once again what has been stated here by many other colleagues before me: what we need in order to get back on track in achieving the MDGs are practical results. Failure to secure them could be fatal for the credibility of the international community and the United Nations, as its most representative and universal instrument. We cannot and should not allow this to happen.

Mr. Sow (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Bangladesh on behalf, respectively, of the Group of 77 and China, the Group of African States and the least developed countries.

The midpoint towards 2015 is an opportune moment for my country to critically examine the road travelled and to assess the immense efforts still needed in order to achieve the first two Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Generally speaking, the facts set out in our two initial national reports on the MDGs, which Guinea adopted in 2002 and 2005, reflect mixed results. In real terms, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was 1.2 per cent in 2003 and 2.7 per cent in 2004, while the average annual growth rate of the population was estimated at 3.1 per cent. According to official

estimates, per capita GDP has decreased from $379 in 2002 to $332 in 2006. Furthermore, as inflation has increased to a worrying degree, each year, rising from 6.1 per cent in 2002 to 39.1 per cent in 2006, purchasing power has weakened. This, in turn, increases inequality and has put the percentage of people living below the poverty line at 53.6 in 2005, compared to 49 per cent in 2002.

The prevalence of underweight — that is, chronic malnutrition — in children under 5 has decreased from 23 per cent to 20 per cent, while that of emaciation, or acute malnutrition, has regressed, from 9 per cent to 11.2 per cent.

If the macroeconomic trends of recent years persist and if the worsening of poverty is not brought under control, Guinea will not be able to achieve the target for the reduction of poverty and extreme poverty.

Nevertheless, important progress has been made in the field of education. Overall primary school enrolment increased by 16 percentage points in 2001, from 62 per cent to 78 per cent; the primary education graduation rate, which was 27 per cent in 2000-2001, reached 60 per cent in 2005-2006. With the current trend, while there is a real hope of attaining 100 per cent primary school enrolment by 2015, primary education graduation rates will reach only 83.7 per cent by 2015.

Significant improvements have also been noted in respect to the elimination of gender disparities. Between 2001-2002 and 2003-2004, the ratio of girls to boys went from 72 per cent to 76 per cent at the primary school level and from 41 per cent to 45 per cent at the secondary level. If we keep up this pace, there is a chance to achieve gender equality by the deadline.

This troubling portrait is explained both by poor management of available resources and by the particularly limiting course of events that affected Guinea between 2000 and 2005. Faced with the drastic consequences of instability in our subregion, Guinea, which was already sheltering close to a million refugees, or almost one tenth of its population, had to struggle to neutralize repeated rebel attacks in 2000. The result was a serious deterioration of the macroeconomic situation of the country, along with the suspension of our programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the loss of momentum of the implementation of the national poverty reduction strategy.

This explains the social tensions which struck the country from March 2006 to February 2007, which ended with a new Government under the authority of the Prime Minister as head of Government. Stepped up governmental action to consolidate social peace and rebuild the foundations of good governance and our development process are true reasons for the people of Guinea to be hopeful.

Recently, therefore, a second poverty reduction strategy document was developed and adopted. It will serve as an MDG operationalization framework for Guinea for the period 2007-2010. In this context, the financing needed for the achievement of the MDGs is estimated to be $12.5 billion, or $1.39 billion per year for a period of nine years. This is an ambitious objective, but it is a challenge that, if met, would enable Guinea to reverse the current trend and set itself on the right path to achieving the MDGs by 2015.

Since its formation in 2007, the new Government has succeeded in relaunching the socio-political dialogue and restoring economic stability, including by improving the exchange rate of the Guinean franc, reducing inflation from 40 per cent to 18.8 per cent and renewing relations with international financial institutions, in particular the IMF. The signing of a formal agreement with the IMF opens the door of cooperation between Guinea and its development partners and provides for debt relief in the framework of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

The Guinean Government is working with laudable success to improve governance and the rule of law and to boldly combat corruption and mismanagement of public resources, while ensuring the effective functioning of development programmes. At the same time, we are hoping for strong mobilization on the part of our social and development partners with a view to lightening conditionalities and improving the coordination and coherence of interventions. We also hope for institutional and human capacity-building to reduce impediments to trade and to the competitiveness of the national economy, both at local and international levels.

In conclusion, on the behalf of the Republic of Guinea, I once again wish to convey our appreciation to the President of the General Assembly and to the

Secretary-General for the resolute and innovative action that they are carrying out to ensure on-time implementation of the MDGs throughout the world and especially in Africa.

Mr. Mac-Donald (Suriname): Let me express the appreciation of the Republic of Suriname to the President of the General Assembly for convening this very important thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the theme "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015".

At the outset, the delegation of Suriname wishes to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Suriname has committed itself to achieving the MDGs, as guiding principles for its development policies and programmes. The MDGs are therefore integrated in our national development policy framework, which also recognizes the need for building close partnerships with civil society and the private sector in order to attain sustainable economic and social development for our people.

However, aligning national policy and development programmes according to internationally established standards does not necessarily ensure the attainment of the MDGs by 2015. In each country conditions are different, and accomplishing internationally established goals and standards remains, therefore, a highly challenging task.

Achievement of the MDGs depends also on various crucial developments in the world, such as international peace and security, adequate and predictable official development assistance, debt relief and fair trade. MDGs require a collective approach at national, regional and international levels. In this regard, MDG 8 remains of critical importance in our endeavours.

While reports show that in Suriname significant progress has been made towards the achievement of MDG 2, universal primary education, MDG 4, reducing child mortality, and MDG 6, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, progress remains uneven in terms of MDG 1, the eradication of poverty, MDG 3, promoting gender equality, MDG 5, reducing maternal mortality, and MDG 7, ensuring environmental sustainability.

AIDS is the leading cause of death in Suriname in the 24 to 49 age group, with the feminization of the pandemic presenting increased challenges to our national response. Current efforts are focusing on implementing a multisector approach to HIV and reinforcing the coordination capacity of the national HIV/AIDS mechanisms. A national HIV council will be appointed later this year by the President, to convene an annual "State of the Epidemic" forum.

In our Health Sector Plan, the Government promotes an equitable society through, among other things, access to primary healthcare and services, including sexual and reproductive health, reducing the urban-rural health gap, reducing maternal and child mortality, and youth-friendly health services.

Despite our commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women — through, inter alia, ratification of the most comprehensive conventions in this area — we have to acknowledge that women still face challenges in the labour markets and are underrepresented at the highest levels of decision-making in the political society, which further limits their contribution to economic and social development. Therefore, the Government committed to emphasizing gender-based vulnerability and equality in its Integral Gender Action Plan.

The Government of Suriname considers education a priority and has identified it as one of the main pillars in eradicating poverty. The reduction of disparities related to gender, geographical location and socio-cultural background is a key concern of the Government. The multiannual development plan therefore makes specific linkages between effective governance practice and efficient public services as well as private sector development and eradicating poverty as a basis for sustainable human development and achievement of the MDGs.

Today, 3 April, Suriname will sign the Common Country Programme Action Plan for the period 2008-2011 with participating United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF. This Plan addresses the pursuit of the MDGs and reflects some of our national development priorities as already outlined in our national multiannual development plan and thus constitutes a

strategy for focused actions on sustainable human development, eradication of poverty and human rights. We expect that the necessary financial resources will be made available by our development partners to effectively implement this programme.

As we have just passed the midpoint towards achieving the MDGs by the target date of 2015, allow me to reiterate Suriname's commitment to realize sustainable development. We are ready to join the international community in complementing national efforts and creating strong global partnerships for accelerated actions to improve living conditions, well-being and opportunities for the many disadvantaged peoples throughout the globe.

Mr. Bart (Saint Kitts and Nevis): It is indeed an honour to address this body on this very important topic, and we must thank the President and the Secretary-General for the timely hosting of this debate.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has set its own country specific targets, which are directly related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and we are fully committed to meeting them by the year 2015.

Poverty in Saint Kitts and Nevis is associated more with very low wages than with unemployment. On 30 July 2005, after a 350-year presence, the sugar industry was closed. That was due to unfavourable external developments, which led to its unprofitable performance. It left behind a country with high levels of debt and many displaced persons. Sugar was all they knew. In an effort to deal with the first of the MDGs, the Government partnered with the private sector and established retraining programmes and is now making land available for farming by small farmers. In terms of meeting that first MDG, we are on track, but much more has yet to be done.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has ensured that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling. School meals are free at the primary level. Education is compulsory for all children up to the age of 16, and there is a literacy rate of approximately 98 per cent. To that extent, we have met the requirements of MDG 2. However, the Government has recognized that there is a need to do more. In this age of sophisticated technology and computers, literacy has to be redefined. We are currently discussing a green paper that describes educational development policies over the next 10 years.

With regard to the issue of gender equality, Saint Kitts and Nevis ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985. Through our Department of Gender Affairs, we have sought to ensure that women and men enjoy equal access to services offered by the Federation. Women in Saint Kitts and Nevis enjoy equal access to education at all levels. We have experienced some progress in the professions, but meeting our targets in the area of political decision-making and in the boardrooms of companies remains a challenge. There is a need to address the economic, social and cultural barriers that stand in the way. In order to do that, we need help.

Infant mortality rates have fluctuated over the years, but in recent years we have seen some improvement. That is reflective of the ongoing expansion of the coverage and enhanced equality of the care given to prenatal and perinatal patients at the primary-health-care level.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has a comprehensive maternal health programme that caters for persons who gain access to care at hospitals and health centres. All babies are delivered at hospitals; there are no longer home deliveries. Maternal death in Saint Kitts and Nevis is rare, and in that regard we have met MDG 5.

HIV/AIDS remains a threat. We are conscious of the devastation that it can have on those who contribute most to our economy. We continue to fight the disease and the stigmatization of people living with it. In addition to the social benefits that we gain by fighting the stigma, we believe we can better monitor and have more accurate figures regarding the disease.

The Ministry of Health has prepared a national strategic plan for health and development, which outlines our country's plan for health. It goes hand in hand with the Millennium Development Goals. We believe in a holistic approach to the issue of health, and so MDGs 4, 5 and 6 are being addressed under the health plan, along with other diseases, so as to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with chronic non-communicable diseases. The plan addresses prevention, treatment for clients, support, advocacy, surveillance, epidemiology and research, and programme coordination and management with regard to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. The plan will be available to the public next week. We

expect to begin seeing success by 2012, resulting in a population that will have adequate access to quality health care at an affordable cost, improved quality of life and increased life expectancy.

Ensuring environmental sustainability, MDG 7, is a goal of the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis. Our very survival depends upon it. It is vital for keeping our tourism industry alive. Sugar cane has prevented disastrous erosion of the soil and has allowed the filtration of rainfall to the aquifers that supply approximately 90 per cent of our potable water to the population. Climate change is an ever-present danger, but, in the country-specific context of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the achievement of this MDG has more to do with what the developed countries are doing than with what we do. Therefore, the achievement of this MDG cannot be seen in the context of the nation; it must be a global Goal. While some things have been done, the evidence dictates that more has to be done.

It is known that there is much benefit to be gained from global partnership. In an attempt to improve our competitiveness in the global economy, we joined the Caribbean Single Market and Economy in 2006. It is hoped that, if we are allowed to operate on a level playing field, this important stage of regional integration will generate opportunities for economic growth. But our size will forever be a challenge in terms of economies of scale.

The MDGs are incorporated into the goals that my Government has set for its people. It is not an easy road, but we are taking it. We are continuing to invest in our people, in agriculture and in infrastructure, and we are partnering with the private sector. We are doing what has been asked of us, but we need the help of others. This is not a plea for charity or pity, but a request that those whose activities have caused damage to the developing world and who have set the terms of a world economic order in which we had no say recognize their moral obligation to provide adequate compensation to the developing world.

Mr. Kavanagh (Ireland): The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) summarize the main development challenges facing the world. They present a set of clear and measurable targets to be achieved by 2015. When the MDGs were agreed, they spurred our efforts to tackle poverty and its consequences. Much has been achieved to date, but more needs to be done. We must use this opportunity, now in 2008, to address the challenges we face and to get back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015, before it is too late.

The MDGs inform all aspects of Ireland's development cooperation programme, Irish Aid, and provide the context in which it operates. That is true not least in relation to poverty reduction, which is the overarching objective of Irish Aid's activities. Furthermore, Irish Aid has mainstreamed gender equality, HIV/AIDS and environmental sustainability throughout its work, as well as addressing the corresponding MDGs through specific programmes.

Ireland has committed itself to spending 0.7 per cent of gross national product on official development assistance (ODA) by 2012, and we are on track to meet that target; last year, we reached 0.5 per cent on schedule. The United Nations remains at the core of our collective efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and Ireland therefore is strongly committed to continuing to support the United Nations system and to enhancing its capacity to continue to provide leadership in that regard. We will soon sign multiannual funding agreements with UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Negotiations with the World Health Organization are under way, and we plan to start negotiations on a multiannual funding agreement with the United Nations Development Programme later this year. That will give those organizations very sizeable predictability of funding.

While time will not permit a full description of all activities undertaken by Irish Aid to support efforts to achieve the MDGs, a number of particular initiatives are perhaps worthy of mention.

Ireland's commitment to combating hunger is not without historical context. The failure of the potato crop in Ireland in the 1840s led to a famine that left one and a half million people dead and forced one million to emigrate — a loss of some 25 per cent of my country's population within 24 months. Since then, Ireland's fortunes have changed, but hunger and food insecurity continue to hamper progress in reaching the MDGs in many developing countries. Ireland stands with them.

In 2007, we established a Hunger Task Force in Ireland with the aim of identifying the particular contribution that our country can make to international efforts to eliminate hunger and to tackle food

insecurity. The Task Force brings together leading figures from international organizations, the non-governmental sector, third-level institutions, Government and the private sector. The Task Force will report to Irish Aid later this year with analysis and recommendations on how Ireland can best address the issue of world hunger through specific policy formulation, programming engagement and targeted resource allocation.

We also share the heightened international concern at the possible effects of the soaring prices of primary commodities on the ability of a significant portion of the world's population to feed themselves. We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General and his colleagues will give special attention to that issue at this April's session of the Chief Executives Board.

Health is one of the key sectors supported by Irish Aid. Ireland uses sector-wide approaches and channels its funding through Government-managed pooling arrangements. In that way, we seek to help strengthen health systems, providing the foundation needed to achieve the MDGs on child mortality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS and malaria.

More specifically, Ireland works closely with UNICEF to reduce child mortality and, more generally, to improve the situation of the world's children. We will soon sign a multi-year funding agreement, committing to fixed increases in core funding for UNICEF for the remainder of the life of the Fund's Strategic Plan. Ireland is committed to spending at least €100 million per year combating HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases in developing countries, and we are doing so.

Of all the Millennium Development Goals, the least progress has been achieved on the Goal of reducing maternal mortality by 75 per cent between 1990 and 2015. The number of women dying in childbirth continues to be startling: the risk of a woman dying from complications of pregnancy in her lifetime is as high as one in seven in some African and Asian countries. That statistic is unthinkable to those in many more fortunate countries. It is clear that extra effort is needed on the part of all countries to ensure the achievement of MDG 5. Ireland is proud to have contributed €2 million to the new UNFPA thematic trust fund for maternal health, "No Woman Should Die Giving Life". That fund will support 75 of the poorest countries with a view to delivering better services for women before, during and after childbirth.

Education has been central to Ireland's own economic and social development, so it is perhaps not surprising that we advocate sustained and planned investment in education in developing countries. We are pleased to see the progress that some countries — in particular our partners Tanzania and Uganda — have made towards achieving the Goal of universal primary education by 2015. We will continue to work towards the achievement of that Goal.

This year, Ireland's total ODA budget totalled €914 million, and we are proud that our official development spending is increasing steadily. However, funding alone is not enough; a true partnership is needed if we are to achieve the MDGs. We must all strive for greater aid effectiveness. Donors should align with national plans, as developing countries lead their own development. We should all seek to improve governance: globally, by increasing coherence among donors and other international development actors, and nationally, by working together to build capacity in developing countries. For if we fail to achieve the MDGs, it is the world's poorest who will continue to suffer. We should all be held accountable.

Ms. Rodríguez de Ortiz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, our delegation associates itself with the important statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. However, we wish to make several comments.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela highlights the importance of the overall topic of this thematic debate, related to evaluating the achievements and challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We consider it a response to the clamour of the majority of the developing countries at the economic and social deterioration to which millions of citizens are being subjected because of the lack of access to the financial resources necessary for life. That was denounced by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, at the 2005 World Summit (see A/60/PV.6), when heads of State or Government, having gathered together to carry out such an evaluation, found themselves in a debate on United

Nations reform, which postponed a discussion that is urgent and imperative for our peoples.

For the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the topic of eradicating poverty and hunger is crucial. It has become the main pillar of action for our social development policy, because we understand that poverty is one of the most savage affronts to human beings, as it attacks their dignity and violates their human rights. Moreover, poverty cannot be eliminated through the capitalist production model, which, by its very nature and its dynamics, destroys and condemns human beings, producing misery and causing injustice and inequality.

We also welcome this debate not only because of the results that we can show the world as a result of some of the targets met within the framework of the Millennium Declaration goals, but also, and in particular, because of the social debt that we are paying back to our peoples.

To that end, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on the basis of the principles of equity, solidarity and social inclusion and with the objectives of eradicating poverty, achieving social justice, guaranteeing the universal and equal enjoyment of human rights and strengthening social and citizen participation, has been developing a series of social programmes known as social missions. These are socio-economic programmes on a massive scale, articulated within the new socialist development model currently being formulated within the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and aimed primarily at those who were victims of social exclusion. The results of those programmes in the fight against poverty are clear.

In 1998, the number of poor households and households in extreme poverty accounted for 43.9 and 17.1 per cent of all households, respectively. Nine years later, in the first six months of 2007, the percentage of the country's population living in extreme poverty was recorded at 9.7 per cent, illustrating that our country has been able to achieve the goal on extreme poverty established in the Millennium Declaration well ahead of schedule.

Our achievements with regard to education are equally well known. The enrolment rate for basic education, which stood at 82.8 per cent in 1998, has continued to increase consistently, reaching 91.9 per cent in 2006. That makes it possible for us to say that we expect to reach the goal of universal basic education before 2015.

In barely two years, through our Robinson Mission programme, we have succeeded in eradicating illiteracy in our country, earning us the praise of UNESCO. That, along with the establishment of the Bolivarian Schools project and the Ribas and Sucre Missions, has made it possible to implement policies with the sole objective of ensuring education and ending the former exclusionary nature of various subsystems of our educational system. As a result of that policy, 1,770,778 citizens have been guaranteed the right to education, giving them access to greater opportunities in society and to meet one of the basic conditions for improving their living standards. It will also allow us to achieve the goal on gender equality in education, given that we have now achieved parity at all educational levels.

With regard to health, in an effort to ensure access for millions of Venezuelan men and women, a series of policies have been implemented to provide primary health care and access to technology, equipment and hospitals in traditionally excluded regions. The Barrio Adentro Mission is the main vehicle through which that is being achieved. Thanks to that initiative, and in cooperation with the Government of Cuba, free specialist medical care has been provided to a significant percentage of the population through more than 8,500 primary health care centres that are available to almost 18 million people on a 24-hour basis.

With regard to well-equipped diagnostic centres, 1,235 such centres have been established throughout the country to provide the entire population with specialized services such as laboratory tests, X-rays, electrocardiograms, ultrasound tests, upper gastrointestinal endoscopies, ophthalmologic services, emergency diagnosis and intensive care services.

With regard to hospital infrastructure, I should like to point to the construction of the Dr. Gilberto Rodríguez Ochoa Latin American Paediatric Cardiology Hospital to care for children and adolescents with heart problems. The hospital contains 260 beds, 32 intensive care beds, four operating rooms, two haemodynamics units, 30 consultation rooms and an auditorium that can accommodate 130 people. The hospital provides care for patients from the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Another important point that I would like to underscore pertains to our health policy for the treatment of patients suffering from HIV/AIDS, which is based on the principles of universality, free services, equity, social integration, solidarity and non-discrimination. Through that policy, and thanks to an investment of BsF50 million — or about $25 million — medicines are distributed to all registered patients, thereby making it possible for us to fully comply with the goal in this regard.

At the international level, our country is attempting to build a fairer world based on solidarity by establishing mutually beneficial exchanges with our brothers of the South, so as to effectively achieve the Goals of the Millennium Declaration on the basis of solidarity. In that connection, as an oil producing and exporting country, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has been promoting energy integration in the context of South-South cooperation. I should therefore like to highlight the Petroamérica, Petrocaribe and Petrosur initiatives, which were designed as geopolitical facilitators aimed at establishing cooperation and integration mechanisms using the energy resources of the Caribbean, Central American and South American regions as a basis for improving the social and economic conditions of the peoples of the continent. In that regard, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is currently selling about 200,000 barrels of oil daily to Central America and the Caribbean. In addition to providing energy security in support of sustainable development for our sister peoples, this type of effort represents a total savings of some $1.6 billion annually for the countries involved.

We note that there have been references to climate change in this debate, and we are aware that its impact will prevent many countries from achieving the Goals by 2015, if the risk posed by climate change is not reduced and we do not adapt to or mitigate the effects of extreme natural events. Such events have produced catastrophic damage to infrastructure and have left hundreds of thousands of people homeless and without a way to earn a living. They have also threatened food security and increased the vulnerability of many countries of the South. We believe that this obliges the international community to consider the current indebtedness of countries and, in the light of the magnitude and frequency of such events, either partially or wholly cancel their debts. At the same time, the international community should consider a change in its role as international creditor.

We also join in the concerns of a growing number of experts, researchers and ecologists who question how the issue of energy is being addressed in the context of climate change, especially as regards the impact of deforestation, growing inequality and rising food prices, which could lead to an agricultural system based on the exploitation of labour and highly dependent upon large multinationals.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the commitment of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to support initiatives aimed at ensuring that all the citizens of the world — male and female alike — fully enjoy the economic, social and cultural rights to which they are entitled as human beings.

Mr. Tašovski (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): It is an honour to participate in this important thematic debate. I would like to express our thanks to the President of the General Assembly for convening this timely debate, especially now, when we are at the halfway point towards the target year set for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Furthermore, the presence and the statements of the Secretary-General, the Prime Minister of Finland, the Foreign Minister of Mali and the panellists participating in the three panel discussions — on poverty and hunger, education and health, respectively — have shown the sense of urgency that both developing and developed countries attach to the achievement of the MDGs.

Since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, in 2000, the MDGs have become the universally recognized development framework, and their implementation has become the number-one international development objective. Thus, 2008 is a crucial year for making progress in achieving the MDGs. But that will be possible only if we take focused and targeted actions in support of all eight Goals and if those actions are immediately increased and sustained until 2015, on the basis of a shared global strategy.

Attaining the MDGs by 2015 is a major priority for the General Assembly and the international community as a whole. Now, at the midpoint for attaining the Goals, we must take account of the progress made so far, discuss possible solutions to the

existing challenges and renew our commitments to meet the target date of 2015.

Are we on track to meet that target? We are facing both old and new trends: income growth, climate change, high food and energy prices, globalization and urbanization. All of that has strong implications for the poorer countries. Provided that growth in gross domestic product per capita remains 3.5 per cent per annum for developing countries, the number of people living in poverty around the world will fall to 721 million by 2015. But, as we are aware, poverty continues to rise in sub-Saharan Africa and in many least developed countries. On the other hand, in some countries in the developing world, such as China and India, there has been sustained growth. Rapid worldwide growth created 45 million new jobs in 2007, but that also widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, we face serious challenges in sustaining the strong pace of economic growth in the world economy seen over the past few years. While economic growth rates are high, the developing countries — especially the poorest — are vulnerable to a downturn in the global economy.

However, with regard to a number of MDGs and other topics addressed during this thematic debate, some progress can be noted in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child mortality, mounting a global response to climate change and integrating the principles of sustainable development into national policies. Therefore, we must redouble our efforts to implement the MDGs, since it is becoming increasingly obvious that renewed commitment is needed with regard to some regions, in particular Africa.

The Republic of Macedonia, which, as a candidate country for membership in the European Union (EU), has aligned itself with the statement made by the Minister for Growth of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union presidency, is fully committed to the achievement of the MDGs. We fully agree that every country bears the responsibility for its own development, which depends mainly on national policies and strategies. We also agree that global actions are necessary to support national efforts. We are aware that some regions need more shared responsibility than others in order to meet the projected targets. To that end, we endorse the call for renewed commitment to the implementation of the MDGs. We welcome the Secretary-General's high-level event, to take place on 25 September 2008, which is expected to yield additional results for the development financing challenge, as well as the forthcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha in November, as another opportunity to reach agreement on an effective approach aimed at more rapid achievement of all the MDGs.

Each country should assume ownership of and responsibility for its own development agenda and should integrate global MDG targets into its national targets and policies, resulting in programmes and budgetary allocations. In that respect, my Government has formulated its policies and strategies in the context of a comprehensive policy supporting the development agenda of the Republic of Macedonia. As a part of that policy, a national development plan for 2007-2009, outlining the country's strategy for pursuing and achieving the MDGs, has been finalized and adopted. The plan's strategic objective is to provide an overall framework for investments, co-financed from domestic and foreign public sources, that is consistent with the Republic of Macedonia's overall development objectives for that three-year period.

Specifically, the objectives of the national development plan are the following: to make a detailed assessment of the country's existing economic, social and environmental situation from the perspective of its development gaps vis-à-vis the EU and the disparities among its various geographical areas; to formulate strategic and operational objectives; to identify key development and investment priorities at the national level; and to design a consistent matrix whereby development and investment priorities would be met through the country's financial capabilities and in accordance with its macroeconomic and fiscal scenarios. My Government's programme for achieving the MDGs thus remains focused on four main targets: achieving decentralization and good governance through reforms in the area of self-governance, reducing poverty through economic development, supporting the health and education sectors and improving national capacities for sustainable development.

Let me conclude by expressing confidence that the fruitful discussions during this debate will have shown that, if we are to cope successfully with the challenges that lie ahead, partnerships must be built so that we can achieve our common goals. The Republic of Macedonia is ready to contribute to that end.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.